

December 9, 2009

Good Morning:

My name is Debbie Poerio and I am a nurse practitioner and the President/CEO of Integrated Health Services which operates East Hartford's School Based Health Center Program.

I am here to speak in response to the Governor's 5% rescission (\$522,000) to the State Dept. Of Public Health's SBHC line item of 10,440,646. In 2007, the legislature approved \$1.47 million to DPH to fund SBHC's for expansion and enhancement services. East Hartford applied through a competitive bid process and was awarded \$195,000 of the \$1.47 million, of which we have utilized in expanding services and staffing over the past 2 years. Due to an unapproved budget, our SBHCs did not open this year until September 8, 2009. When we opened, we did so with the same level of services as we have offered in the past 2 years as the need was only increasing, and we were unaware of any further cuts. Since that time the SBHC staff has been providing valuable, cost effective, and accessible care to the children of East Hartford in an economy where the requests for services, and the severity of their need, is far greater than ever before due to rising unemployment. We have done so in good faith.

At this late date the 5% rescission will have enough of an impact on our SBHC's by forcing us to close one month earlier than anticipated. However, if the additional 25% proposed reduction is approved, the SBHCs would close 3 months earlier than expected, which would mean that our SBHCs would be closed from March until September. The impact on the services to kids would prove devastating, and place incredible burdens on more costly forms of care. Children will be unable to receive immunizations and physical exams that are required for them to enter the school system. Last year we performed over 300 school entry physical exams or immunizations for children in the first 6 weeks of the school year. Currently there are over 4,800 children enrolled in East Hartford's 4 SBHC programs, which reported 6,825 visits last year. The 5% rescission will reduce our visits by 340 due to closing one month earlier, or over 1,000 less visits for the three month time period if the proposed 25% reduction is approved.

This will NOT prove cost effective for the state as:

- **A majority of these children utilize us as their medical home and will otherwise seek acute care services from the local emergency rooms at a cost of over 16 times the cost of a visit by the SBHC. (\$22 at the SBHC vs \$350 at the emergency rooms)**
- **62% of our students enrolled in the SBHC are also enrolled in the Medicaid program, which the SBHCs bill DSS for, and are reimbursed for those services. As the federal government matches the state's funding by 60%, the impact of all SBHCs closing early will cause a significant decrease in Medicaid services to children, and thus the state's Medicaid revenue from the Federal Government.**

I'd like to give you a more specific benefit of the cost effectiveness of our SBHC program. East Hartford's SBHC was able to hire a dentist for 2 months last year for our elementary school program of 325 children that reported a **60% untreated decay** in October of 2008. Please note that we work closely with the East Hartford CHC who has been wonderful in scheduling timely and convenient times for our children. Unfortunately, access was still an issue and despite the efforts of a dental case manager, at the end of ONE YEAR, 65 of the 84 children still had untreated decay. With a dentist working only 2 months at 8 hours per week providing restorative care, the rate of untreated decay **dropped to 27% within one year (by October 2009)**! This cost less than \$20,000, and will save the state thousands of dollars in emergency care that these children would have required otherwise.

By far however, the most concerning issue is based upon the fact that these cuts came so late in the year, forcing us to close months prior to the end of the school year which is often the most traumatic time for many of our children. Of particular concern is their lack of access to behavioral health services, as there are few accessible mental health resources available to them in East Hartford, and a severe lack of providers throughout the state. In the end, we will see an increase in crime, violence, suspensions, and a fall in their academic achievements. These are not cost-effective reductions. These reductions will not only prove extremely costly to the state, but to the children who will lose services that will have an irreversible impact on their academic, social and emotional future.

I understand that these are difficult times, but cutting necessary direct care health services to children who do not have a voice seems like a poor investment. I don't have the answers of where to cut, but I have faith in you as our legislators to find them for the sake of our children.

Thank you for your time and support of the SBHC Programs statewide!